

TAKE 5

Defensive Driving

No matter what you drive, remember to practice defensive driving at all times. Driving defensively saves lives, time, and money in all types of road conditions, and despite the actions of other drivers, according to the American National Standards Institute and National Safety Council.

Defensive drivers anticipate other drivers' mistakes, maintain a safe speed and distance from other vehicles, and stay alert. Follow these tips to be a safety-conscious driver:



- Stay focused and avoid distractions, such as eating, drinking, talking to passengers, reading, grooming, reaching for items, or using electronic devices. On September 1, 2017, it became illegal to text and drive in Texas, except in a few specific circumstances.
- Always wear your seat belt. It is a proven life-saver. If you have lap and shoulder belts, wear both. Don't wear a shoulder belt on its own.
- Observe your surroundings. Check rearview and side mirrors frequently and scan your field of vision through the windshield for traffic or other hazards.
- Anticipate the actions of motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians moving toward the roadway from side streets, driveways, or parking lots.
- Drive the speed limit or slower if road, traffic, or weather conditions are bad. Leave plenty of distance between you and the vehicle ahead (one vehicle length for every 10 mph in good conditions), and always use your turn signal.
- Know your blind spots and check your mirrors before changing lanes, turning, or merging. Most lane-change or merge crashes occur because the driving changing lanes didn't notice another vehicle or obstacle. Drivers of large trucks should be aware of "no-zones" where passenger vehicles can disappear from view, and should remember that other drivers probably aren't aware of these zones.
- Be careful at intersections. Look out for crossing traffic in all directions before entering an intersection. Don't assume that other drivers will see your signal or will give you the right of way. If you reach an intersection at the same time as another vehicle, allow that vehicle to go first unless the driver signals for you to go first.
- Avoid making left turns across traffic without a stop sign or traffic light, especially if there is no center turn lane.
- Be prepared to slow down or stop if you see a warning sign for hills, curves, or other obstacles that make it hard to see obstacles in the road.
- Be careful when you drive through road work zones and areas with a lot of traffic. Look ahead to check road conditions and anything that might make you brake suddenly.
- If you can't avoid braking when traffic ahead of you stops abruptly, turn on your hazards to warn the drivers behind you that you are reducing your speed.
- If your vehicle has an anti-lock braking system and you have to brake for an obstacle, press and hold the brake pedal and gently steer around the obstacle. Don't pump the brake.
- Have an escape route: slow down or speed up safely to make sure other drivers don't box you in.
- Be kind to other drivers and let them go first when they are determined to do so.
- If you've been drinking, have taken prescription or other drugs, or are tired, don't drive. Designate a sober, alert driver or call a friend, cab, or ride-sharing service.

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